



**National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2012**

BAC Science

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in National Qualifications in this subject.

National Qualifications (NQ) Units

Titles/levels of NQ Units verified

Science Baccalaureate: Interdisciplinary Project

General comments

This is the third year of delivery of the *Interdisciplinary Project* Unit. This year 40 centres presented a total of 176 candidates, with 148 candidates being presented for the interdisciplinary project as part of a Scottish Science Baccalaureate award and 28 undertaking the interdisciplinary project as a stand-alone Unit. All 40 centres were verified with evidence from 129 candidates being subject to verification by External Verifiers.

At central verification the assessment decisions for 101 candidates were judged to have been in line with national standards. This represents 79% of the verified sample. Within 26 centres, assessment decisions were made which were completely in line with national standards. This is an indication that these centres have a solid understanding of the national standards and are confident in their grading of the interdisciplinary project.

Issues were identified in 14 centres where some of their assessment decisions were deemed to have been severe or lenient in relation to the national standards. This resulted in External Verifiers recommending that a total of 20 candidates be down-graded and six up-graded. The final results for the Unit were 67 Grade A passes, 68 Grade B passes, 35 Grade C passes and six No Awards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

A support event was held in November 2011 which was attended by 59 delegates from both new and returning centres for Science and Languages. At this event exemplification materials were used as a basis for discussion on the assessment criteria and national standards.

As in previous years, these events were cross-curricular between Science and Languages to help focus on the skills being developed rather than the content. The support event continues to be crucial in developing a good understanding in centres of the Unit requirements and national standards, and new centres in particular benefit greatly from it.

The quality forum events also provided centres' representatives with the opportunity to see and discuss candidates' evidence from other centres, helping develop and consolidate an understanding of the instruments of assessment and the application of national standards. Centres continue to participate fully in these events.

Taking on board comments from the External Verifiers and centres' representatives, the Science templates were updated in June 2011. While the format and content of the templates remain the same, more guidance has been provided for candidates as to what is required in each section. Comments from the support event and from quality forums indicated that the update has been well received. Also, a candidate guide has been produced and is available on SQA's website.

As part of the updating of templates the assessor checklist has been renamed the assessor report and it has been added to the list of required evidence. These changes have helped emphasise the place of the report in explaining the grading decision. Many centres were commended by the External Verifiers for the level of detail in the comments given in both the assessor report and throughout the evidence and how they informed the external verification process.

The exemplar material on SQA's website continues to be updated with different examples and supporting EV commentaries. These provide samples of A, B and C grades with the commentaries explaining the grading of each exemplar.

Evidence Requirements

The Evidence Requirements are well understood by almost all centres. Fewer centres submitted incomplete evidence than last year; however, there are still some issues in some centres with the non-inclusion of spreadsheets or other documents which contain necessary information, usually on timescales and dependencies. This has been brought to the attention of centres in the EV report where it has occurred.

All centres submitted all mandatory pieces of evidence, but in some cases the content completed by the candidate was insufficient to meet the grade criteria. Where candidates choose narrow subject areas for their projects it often reduces their opportunities to meet certain criteria, limiting their grading possibilities. External Verifiers have commented in their reports where this is the case.

Some centres continue to provide interim reviews, progress logs and in some cases discs containing presentations and reports along with the mandatory evidence. These are not required and are not taken into consideration during central verification. Centres have been advised of this in their EV report where it is relevant.

Administration of assessments

In general most centres used the templates provided by SQA though not all used the updated versions. Some centres used a mix of old and new templates. As the new templates contain prompts to help guide candidates in completing sections, it is important that centres use the most recent versions. Very few centres used amended or self-devised templates for evidence.

Many centres have now developed a very robust internal verification process and this is reflected in the number of grades which have been substantiated during central verification. There is a wide variety of approaches to internal verification, which were well explained by centres' representatives at quality forums. These approaches range from inter-departmental, between Science and Languages where centres are presenting in both, to across whole local education authorities, involving all presenting schools in the authority.

Some centres have developed a system which is more cross-marking rather than internal verification. While cross-marking helps to provide support for the assessor and assessment decisions, having someone unfamiliar with the project to internally verify will help provide a robustness to the grading decision.

There is evidence of returning centres acting on development points that were raised last year and improving their assessment process.

Areas of good practice

The excellent quality of assessors' comments was commended in many EV reports to centres. The breadth and depth of these comments provided a full picture in support of the grading decision and contributed to making the external verification process straightforward.

Centres are to be commended for the support they provide to candidates while still allowing autonomy within the project. Projects were varied and presented significant challenges to some candidates.

Many centres submitted evidence from candidates where there was an obvious genuine interest in the chosen topic and it was clear that the proposal had been very carefully thought through. This will always help to maintain motivation as the candidate develops ownership of their project.

Within a few centres candidates are showing greater creativity in their chosen presentation method. Candidates do not have to do a slide presentation; rather, they can present in a format that is deemed appropriate to their specific project.

Many centres have established excellent links with other schools and with FE/HE. Links with other schools are often supporting assessors but in some cases also the candidates. There is evidence of schools working closely with FE/HE both in terms of assessing and providing environments for candidates to progress their project and research. In particular some more isolated centres are benefiting from these links.

Many centres have encouraged candidates to expand on the broad contexts, explaining why they have selected particular contexts. This is a good way to focus candidates on the context of their project.

In general, External Verifiers have reported that candidates are being more reflective in their self-evaluation. This may be due to the improved prompts in the templates in relation to skills, though there is also evidence that some centres are asking pupils to carry out initial skills assessments which will help candidates reflect on their progress.

Specific areas for improvement

Some centres are allowing candidates to carry out a mainly internet-based research project with little external contact. These do not allow candidates to fully meet many criteria as they are not sufficiently interdisciplinary and do not allow candidates to access a variety of learning environments. Also, poor guidance on project choice in some centres has resulted in narrow project topics which have disadvantaged candidates. Projects should contain sufficient strands to allow candidates the opportunity to meet A-grade criteria.

Centres should be aware that there is a danger in the evaluation of the project that candidates evaluate the product rather than the process. Candidates should not be going into detail on their presentation/leaflet/display but should be evaluating their strengths, weaknesses and learning points throughout their planning of the project, their carrying it out and their findings.

With many returning centres, assessors should be confident in their assessment decisions. There is some evidence from centres in quality forums that workload is being increased due to projects being re-marked as they progress, rather than undergoing internal verification at the end point.